

## **PREPARING FOR COURT**

In Indiana, the Courts are open to each and every person. Although there is no requirement that a person have a lawyer to go to Court, you are encouraged to see a lawyer to make sure you are doing the right thing. Should you choose to represent yourself, you must be prepared. For legal advice about your case, you should contact a lawyer. To be prepared for your Court hearing, you should consider several things.

### **Things to do before your Court date.**

1. Read over all of your Court documents. Be familiar with all the documents that you and the other side have submitted to the Court.
2. All parties in a Court action must be given proper notice of all pending matters and hearings. Make sure you deliver a copy of each document or piece of information that is filed or delivered to the Court to the other side.
3. Review and research the statutes, rules or procedure, and case law that apply to your type of case. You need to be prepared “legally” for court. The Court will require you to follow the same rules and procedures that an attorney must follow. Often it is helpful to observe another case similar to yours in the same Court a couple of days before your hearing date so that you can see how the Court conducts its proceedings.
4. Gather all the papers you want the judge to see. Make at least three copies of each of these to take to Court.
5. Decide who you want to testify in Court on your behalf. Remember, in Court, you cannot tell the judge what someone else said. So if you need that statement introduced in Court, the person who made the statement needs to testify.
6. Write out your questions in advance. Go over your questions with your witnesses ahead of time. This will prepare both you and them for the actual hearing.
7. Create an outline or a brief summary of your side of the case. It may be helpful to prepare a brief list of your main points so you will be sure you state all that is necessary.

### **Things to do the day of your Court date.**

1. You need to know your case number. Be prepared to tell the Judge, the staff of the Court, and the Clerk the number of your case.
2. When you come to Court, bring the original and the three copies of any papers you want the Judge to see. The Court will keep any item offered in evidence.
3. You should dress appropriately when going to court. This means no T-shirts or jeans with holes in them, halter tops, baseball hats, or sweatpants. Dress as if you were going to church. This shows respect for the Judge, other parties, and for the Court staff.

4. Be respectful to everyone. Call the Judge “Your Honor.” It is extremely important that you remain calm at all times and refrain from arguing with anyone. Everyone will get an opportunity to tell their side of the story. Be polite and wait for your turn.
5. Arrive early for your court hearing. This will help ease any nervousness or confusion. However, be prepared to wait in case earlier cases take longer than expected.
6. Keep your guests to a minimum. Having too many guests who have no involvement in your case can cause distractions for everybody. Try not to bring your children to court. The Court proceedings are recorded and it is important that everyone who is not testifying remain quiet.
7. Be prepared to offer a brief summary of your side of the case. You need to tell the judge exactly what you want.
8. When asking your witnesses questions, always start by asking them their name and address. If their job is important to your case, ask them what their occupation is, what their educational degrees are, and how long they have been doing their job. Then ask the specific questions that will bring out the information they have about your case.
9. You have the right to ask the other side and their witnesses questions during the hearing. You should never ask a question which you do not know what the answer will be. This could hurt your case more than help it.

Give yourself plenty of extra time to get to Courthouse. It is very important that you arrive on time. Most courts have metal detectors at their entrances, so it may take several extra minutes to enter the Courtroom. Any bags or packages that are brought to court are subject to inspection. Weapons are not permitted. Make sure you turn off all cellular phones and beepers.

If you need any special arrangements in regards to disabilities or special needs, call ahead to the office you need to visit. By making arrangements related to speech and hearing disabilities, vision problems, handicap accessibility, or language barriers, you can ensure that you will receive the best service possible by the Courts.

We truly want your experience with the Indiana Judicial System to be a pleasant experience. The better informed and prepared you are, the more likely it will be that you will find your experience to be a positive one.